

LET US WALK, ADVANCE, GO ON PILGRIMAGE TO BETHLEHEM TO ENCOUNTER THE CHILD JESUS

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Dear Family:

"And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. They were overjoyed at seeing the star, and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh." (Mt 2:9-11)

Merry and Blessed Christmas!

During the liturgical season of Advent we have walked with the Magi along a path that, illuminated by the Word of God and fortified by the Sacraments, has helped us to advance in humility, with haste and great determination towards Bethlehem to encounter the Child Jesus. This whole journey has had as its purpose to prepare our hearts with certain interior dispositions: prayer, contemplation, service and concrete acts of love, a sincere search for all that can be an obstacle for the Child Jesus to be born and live in our hearts; the need for conversion, for repentance, to turn the direction of our affections and interests to learn to give ourselves to others, to make of our lives a gift. These interior dispositions put us on the path to advance in pilgrimage towards an encounter with God made man. These interior dispositions open our spiritual gaze so that we may be able to recognize the precise place where we can encounter the Child Jesus and there prostrate our life before God made man, to give Him the homage of our love, our faith, and our hope.

God has become man, he has become a child, to come to encounter man, He was first in setting out on the journey to come to encounter humanity and to give Himself completely to the work of our Redemption. Jesus set out to come to a stable, to the Bethlehem of humanity and to illumine our darkness, to give joy to our sadness, to give hope to our broken horizons, to give liberty to the captive, to give health to the sick, to give forgiveness and mercy to humanity wounded by sin. Bethlehem speaks to us of the path that God has taken to come to encounter man...In Bethlehem, Jesus, who had become a child, reveals Himself as the God who seeks man, who becomes small to enable Himself to be encountered, who brings Himself close, to be able to be seen, touched, heard...He becomes one of us so that we can see in Him, our true image and our highest dignity. God came in search of man, He journeyed from Heaven to Earth to encounter us in Bethlehem.

Jesus is born in Bethlehem and this stable will always be a privileged place for being "the Tent of the Living God," the "meeting tent", where the Word Incarnate encountered humanity...and where humanity encountered God who is love. Humanity, represented in the shepherds and the Magi, set out to encounter the God Child...everyone had to walk towards the stable to encounter there the Child in the arms of His Mother, and together with St. Joseph. The shepherds were directed towards the stable by the

indication of the angels...the Magi arrived there by the light of the Star that preceded them, showing them the way and which then stopped at the precise place where the Child was to be found.

Dear Family, we also must set out, go on pilgrimage to Bethlehem to arrive - on this beautiful and luminous Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord - before the God Child and offer Him our life as a gift of love to Him who has loved us first. He came to the world to give Himself...He is the greatest gift of the Father to humanity....He is the most beautiful gift of Christmas!! And we must be His Christmas gift. Each one of us knows which three areas of our lives we can offer Jesus this Christmas...Each one knows which is his gold, his incense, and myrrh... These three gifts of the Magi must be perpetuated in history through each one of us who have walked the journey this Advent, taking in our hands, simple offerings, humble, but true, good and beautiful, that today we can present to the Child Jesus when we arrive in Bethlehem and prostrate ourselves before the manger.



Today we celebrate Christmas, today we encounter the Child Jesus in the manger...today also, before the contemplation of the love of God, we must respond to His love, to His journey towards an encounter with humanity, giving Him the treasures of our heart: giving Him the gold of hearts transformed in the fire of His love, the gold of our total availability to be protagonists and collaborators in the building of His Kingdom of love, truth, life, peace, solidarity, and justice; giving Him the incense of our prayer and our adoration, making our whole life an offering of praise, making the splendor of our good deeds shine before men to evoke a canticle of love for God in many; the incense of our coherence of life to raise many hearts to God: we must also give Him the myrrh of our redeemed humanity, elevated in virtue, formed in the values of the Gospel and mature in choices, many times sacrificial, and which require our abnegation, so that we may live according to the dignity of children of God and the sublime vocation of the human person: love.

God set out to come to encounter man...His path was the immaculate womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary...Also, to come to be born in Bethlehem, Jesus also walked through His Mother, He walked through Her and together with His virginal father St. Joseph. Today, I invite you all to be pilgrims, that we may go on pilgrimage to Bethlehem together with and through the Heart of Our Mother and the heart of St. Joseph...that like the shepherds and Magi, we may adore the Child Jesus...Let us contemplate the Countenance of Love, and may this contemplation evoke a Magnificat in our hearts, a profound desire to give our gold, our incense and our myrrh to the Child who was born for us. Let us walk, advance, toward Bethlehem, with haste, with humility but with determination to go to encounter the Child Jesus in the arms of His Mother, together with St. Joseph.

Before the contemplation of the love of God, before the contemplation of the donation of Himself to humanity...may we also give Him our lives as a Christmas gift.

Let us go on pilgrimage together towards Bethlehem to encounter the Child Jesus.

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